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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/06/05
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ECIN](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: Uzbekistan Gives Mixed Review of SCO Activities

REF: 08 TASHKENT 639; 08 TASHKENT 1061

CLASSIFIED BY: Steven Prohaska, Second Secretary, State, Pol-Econ;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a discussion of Uzbekistan's views of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on June 3, a representative of Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed that President Karimov will attend the SCO heads of state summit in Yekaterinburg June 15-16, immediately after which Uzbekistan will assume the chairmanship of the organization for one year. Uzbekistan is keeping the SCO at arm's-length on matters related to Afghanistan and appears anxious to ensure that its views be taken into account in all SCO decisions. The Government of Uzbekistan (GOU) still sees value in the security and economic aspects of the organization, but appears frustrated with other members' attempts to expand the SCO, as the organization's new institutions and initiatives drain resources away from areas that Uzbekistan deems more worthwhile. End summary.

¶2. (C) On June 3, Poloff met with Uzbekistan's National Coordinator for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Afzal Artikov and Second Secretary Muhammad Rashidov of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department for Cooperation with CIS, CSTO, and SCO. Structures to discuss Uzbekistan's policies with regard to the SCO. Artikov remarked that it was an honor to be selected by Foreign Minister Norov for the meeting and produced several typed sheets of text that he read from periodically.

Views of SCO Afghanistan Conference, Role of SCO in Afghanistan

¶3. (C) Referring to the March 27 SCO conference on Afghanistan in Moscow, Artikov noted that the SCO had first raised the issue of an Afghanistan conference in 2007. In 2008, Uzbekistan gave its consent to holding such a conference, but played no part in conference preparations, hosting, or even participating. It also

signed no documents that resulted from the conference. (Note: In a March conversation between Embassy officials and Uzbekistan's Foundation for Regional Policy (FRP)-a "think tank" with ties to Uzbekistan's National Security Council-FRP representatives explicitly ruled out the participation of representatives of the SCO in a joint FRP-Marshall Center Afghanistan-themed conference to take place June 17-19. End note.) Artikov asserted that issues related to Afghanistan should be addressed via the "6 plus 3" mechanism that President Karimov has previously called for or on a bilateral basis between individual SCO members and Afghanistan, rather than having the bloc itself cooperate with the country. Uzbekistan sees some kind of role for the SCO-created "Contact Group" in Afghanistan, however. This is a consultative body that should address issues of interest to all SCO members and Afghanistan, and move forward only on issues that all members of the SCO reach consensus on supporting.

Uzbekistan to Assume SCO Chairmanship

¶4. (C) Artikov affirmed that President Karimov will participate in the June 15-16 SCO heads of state summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, after which Uzbekistan will assume the chairmanship of the organization for one year. He noted that the next SCO summit will take place in Tashkent at a date to be determined in June 2010. When asked what Uzbekistan hopes to accomplish under its chairmanship, Artikov said that Uzbekistan's plans are still under

consideration and that he would receive instructions soon. He said it was his understanding, based on statements from President Karimov, that Uzbekistan's responsibilities as SCO chairman will include implementing agreements, enhancing cooperation with observer states, and increasing the authority of the SCO in the region and the world.

SCO Should Focus on Security and Economic Cooperation

¶5. (C) Uzbekistan thinks highly of the SCO and believes the organization has great potential, Artikov stated. The SCO is an authoritative international organization that helps to preserve peace and stability, is open, and is not directed at other states or organizations. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan believes that development of the SCO into a military-political bloc is not desirable, and in practically all military exercises, Uzbekistan has participated only as an observer. (Note: We have heard similar critical remarks about the military component of the SCO from many GOU officials on many occasions in the past. End note.) Artikov said that a fundamental principle the SCO adheres to in its decision-making process is consensus-a factor that ensures equality between member states. "Uzbekistan strictly follows this principle and calls on others to observe it," he asserted. Artikov said that the SCO should focus on its top priorities: security (and cited counterterrorism, counterextremism, and counternarcotics as being key elements of this) and economic cooperation (particularly improving socio-economic conditions in each SCO member state). Uzbekistan is hoping that cooperation with the organization can help Uzbekistan realize its goals, including attracting further foreign direct investment, establishing joint ventures, producing consumer goods, and receiving high-tech equipment.

Extraneous Institutions, Poorly Prepared Initiatives

¶6. (C) Artikov complained that Uzbekistan opposes a number of poorly prepared SCO initiatives that weaken the effectiveness of the organization. Uzbekistan wants the SCO to hold expert working group meetings and to clearly outline anticipated results prior to proposing initiatives. He also said it was unacceptable for the SCO to develop so many new structures, like charter bodies, parliamentary assemblies, inter-academy councils, a counternarcotics center, an Emergency Situations Center, an Energy Club, and various educational structures. The proliferation of these new institutions distributes resources too widely and distracts the SCO from its main priorities, he continued. Uzbekistan wants to avoid the creation of new institutions with unclear tasks and goals and non-priority issues should instead be addressed on a bilateral basis.

SCO Partners

¶7. (C) This year, SCO has considered making Belarus and Sri Lanka partners of the SCO, Artikov continued. The organization has three categories for countries affiliated with it: full members, observers, and partners. Artikov explained that only members are decision makers, while observers are limited to observing processes and making statements, and partners cooperate with the SCO on particular issues determined by special memoranda concluded between the partner state and the organization. The partner category is a new initiative, and the SCO will sign special memoranda with Belarus and Sri Lanka after the official decision is made on these states becoming partners.

Vague Comments on RATS

¶8. (C) Artikov described the SCO's Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS) as a valid platform for uniting the efforts of the SCO's special services and conducting joint actions. Uzbekistan will retain the chairmanship of RATS, which it has held since September 2008, until September 2009. The chairmanship will then rotate to Kazakhstan. When asked about the program of cooperation in combating terrorism between 2010 and 2012, Artikov vaguely alluded to fighting the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism, neutralizing terrorist activities, combating terrorist financing, and promoting counterterrorism cooperation between special services and law enforcement bodies and with observer states and other international organizations.

Comment:

¶9. (C) Though Uzbekistan remains interested in the potential to derive security and economic benefits from cooperation within the framework of the SCO, it appears to have becoming increasingly frustrated (or increasingly willing to express such dissatisfaction) with the organization's expansion into areas that Uzbekistan considers to be inappropriate or of relatively little importance. During this meeting, Artikov was far more critical of new SCO structures than other GOU officials have been in previous interactions with us. Artikov's call for the SCO to focus on security and economic cooperation tracks with recent comments that

Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Russia Ilhom Nematov has made in the Russian press. Artikov and Rashidov also appear interested in hearing about how the U.S. views the SCO and its activities in the future.

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